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THE GRAPHIC WORK OF THE EXPEDITION

DURING the season 1921-22 my own time was largely taken up with literary work, and with the bettering of my acquaintance with the three hundred numbered tombs of the necropolis; for it has become more and more evident that only a comparative method can enable one rightly

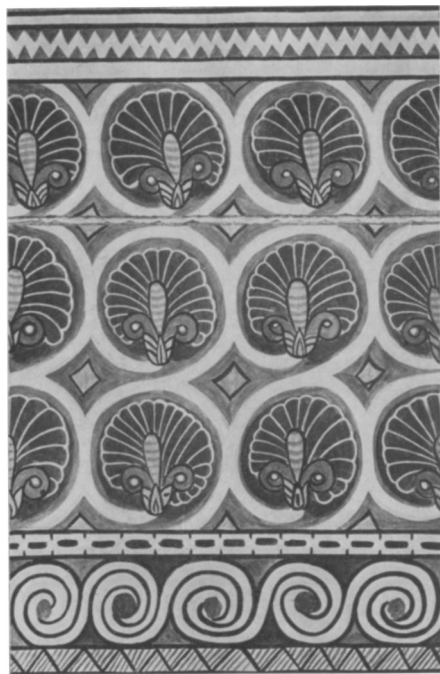


FIG. I

to interpret a particular scene, to restore its broken lines in imagination or on paper, and to give the art of a tomb its true place in the history of Egyptian painting. Nevertheless, though the main harvest consisted of the colored work of my assistants, a goodly number of records were secured in notes or drawings, the small tomb, No. 54, was completely copied, and the work in the tomb of Neferhotpe was brought nearer completion. As usual, too, some portion of my time was devoted to making notes or drawings in tombs which were in danger

of serious defacement. I have always felt that the generous outlook of the Metropolitan Museum justified me in including in our program not only such pictures as were specially typical, attractive, or meritorious, but also such as were threatening ruin. Every now and then such a case falls under, or is brought to, my notice, and when the calls upon its time in any way allow, the copying staff is ready to meet it.

It may safely be said that the responsibility for the art treasures of Egypt, and for the still lamentably defective record of those data on which an inquiry into the birth and growth of man's spirit must depend, is a heavy one at the present time. It is a world interest, and it would be small consolation for any eternal loss to it if Great Britain as the *de facto* trustee, and France as the administrative agent, could be loaded with reproaches, many of which would be well deserved but at the present moment can least be urged. The advance made in our knowledge of Egypt in the early decades of last century was amazingly rapid, as the centenary of Champollion reminds us; but it included reconnaissances which we have had to recall, or local advances which, being too stubbornly maintained, are hindering the general campaign. Since then progress has been most conspicuous on the philological side; elsewhere the tendency had often been toward brilliant sallies which might well be postponed, rather than to the laborious accumulation of munitions and the perfection of ordnance. First place should now be given to the conservation of the raw material of this human science, since it has not the permanence of the data of natural sciences, but may easily be destroyed and become as extinct as the dodo by a few years of advance in civilization, so called. This solicitude is obligatory on all peoples, in proportion to their resources, their true philanthropy, and their far-seeing idealism. Moreover, this is the time; for Egypt is threatened with the loss of even the moder-

ately efficient guardianship of her age-long records.

This branch of our Expedition is not, of course, bent on forming theories on the origin of art or on the spiritual history of mankind, but, first and foremost, on acquiring copies of the achievements of the ancient artist. This ambition for exact reproduction may seem to many to be of no high order; but it may be urged that this is a great error which is only now being suspected, and that the work of the copyist, however mechanical it may be, ought to be increasingly valued and encouraged, and to an indefinite extent. Its power of multiplying and bringing to the doors of the peoples the humanizing and refining influences of art should give it a high place among the means of instruction and culture. No doubt an art characterized essentially by subtleties which are beyond all imitation cannot make much use of it; but Egyptian painting is not of this sort. The work of the Expedition in this respect is only in its infancy, and is capable of large improvement with increased resources and when the decrease of the still imperative need to rescue the jetsam of the ages enables us to proceed more leisurely and by more delicately adjusted processes. All things considered, a good deal has been done, and the Metropolitan Museum is probably now better fitted to illustrate the history of Egyptian draughtsmanship and painting than any other similar institution in the world, unless it be the British Museum, which acquired superlative originals at a date when the rapacity of dealers could be in a measure condoned.

A typical occasion of our rescue work accounts for one of the drawings reproduced here, though it might otherwise be justified by the importance of the purely decorative products of Egyptian art—one of its most influential legacies to the after-world. Having some copying to do in a certain tomb, we found its walls unapproachable; for the floor was strewn with fragments in a lamentable state of ruin, due to the penetration of rain-water and to visitors stumbling over them in the dark. As they were of considerable interest, I was forced, before beginning the work we came to do, to

sort over, bring together, and copy a large number of them. Incidentally I found, after industrious inquiry among the older guards, that they did not come from this tomb at all, or one of its period, but had been laid there temporarily by an inspector and forgotten on his removal from the district. Fig. 1 shows a ceiling pattern thus acquired, demonstrating the survival of Middle Kingdom motifs into the early XVIII dynasty.¹ Another ceiling design (fig. 2), from the vault of Tomb 8, shows



FIG. 2

how the floral friezes common in Ramesside times were coming in already towards the end of the XVIII dynasty.

Salvage operations on a larger scale, which to a still greater degree combine a service to the necropolis with the interests of the Museum, were begun in the tomb of Queen Nofretari. It forms one of the finest examples of Ramesside art, but is falling into decay, owing to natural causes

¹I have since found that this shell-like design (from Tomb 162) occurs again in the contemporary tomb, No. 251, and also in an archaizing tomb, No. 160. Both patterns have had their injuries made good by us.

which are in large measure beyond repair. Copying of a faithful sort is therefore long overdue, and must be further prosecuted if satisfactory illustrations of this important phase of later Egyptian art are to survive. The work is not easy and the site a distant one, but two attractive excerpts have been secured this season. The subjects in this tomb, like most Ramesside decoration, are taken from the vignettes of the Book of the Dead, executed on a large scale and with minute detail. Fig. 4 shows

might still have some exercise. The figure of the queen exemplifies, though not so well as some others on the walls, a technical advance in which this artist had few rivals, and no peers. I refer to the introduction of shading, a practice which, had it been pursued further, might have meant the transformation of Egyptian painting. It appears here in a form in which we can scarcely fail to see true shading; that is to say, the deepening of color when in shadow, and not merely



FIG. 3

the goddess Nephthys as a falcon watching over the bier, the sacred heron (phoenix) of Heliopolis, and one of the twin lions supporting the eastern horizon where the sun leaves the cradling mountains of earth for the journey to the plains of high heaven. It forms a good example of the way in which the Egyptian artist used his biblical history for ornamental, as well as religious, ends. The falcon, it must be confessed, is wooden; but in the other two animals the wealth of decorative detail does not impair the strong outlines.

Fig. 3 shows the owner of the tomb in her pavilion, engaged in that game which was regarded as the favorite pastime of the happy dead, a recreation in which the administrative gifts now lost to the world

its natural variations. Though the phenomenon is not consistently reproduced by the artist, it is plain that it has been observed by him. He limits it to the figure of the queen, being sure, apparently, that his patrons would not sanction it in the case of the full deities, and he confines it to one side of the arms and the fingers, to the creases of the neck, the curves of the cheek, the chin, and the wing of the nose.² It is not certain that the artist modified it for the special lighting of each subject; he may have only used in each picture shadows once noted, and merely chanced to be

²I was not yet aware of the extended use of shading in this tomb when I wrote on the subject in *J. E. A.*, VII, p. 225, but had only observed it in Tomb 51.

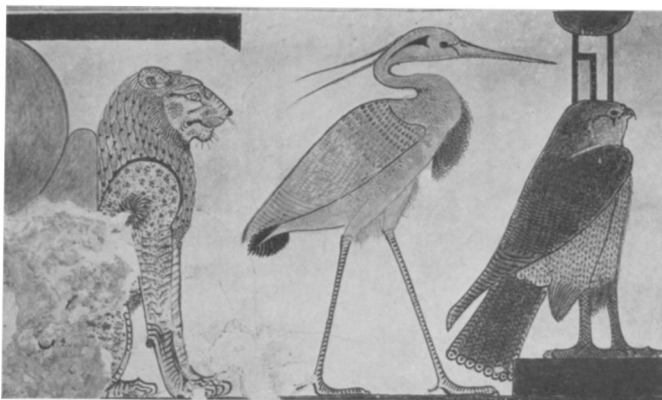


FIG. 4

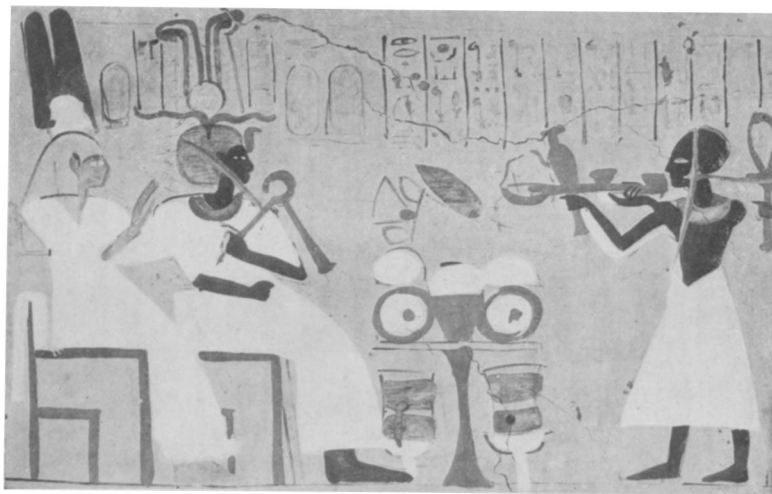


FIG. 5

approximately right in most cases. He was not the first to record the deepening of colors in shade and elsewhere, but as he had the advantage here of being engaged in coloring bas-reliefs, it may have been in this tomb that a painter was first sufficiently impressed by the value of colored shadow to represent it somewhat freely. By limit-



FIG. 6

ing it to the queen, however, he shows how far short he was of feeling that the play of light, and the consequent betrayal of form would, if shown consistently in color, so add new scope and beauty to painting as to make it an obligation. He and other artists seem rather to have regarded such novelties as amusing adventures.

Fig. 5 has been painted and reproduced here to illustrate the other, and unfortunately the more persistent, side of Egyptian art; its complete degradation, namely, in the mass of Ramesseid and later work. This picture (from a usurped tomb, No. 54)

was painted only two generations later than, and side by side with, examples of the fine work of the XVIII dynasty. The same subject appears in Tomb 181,³ and the astonishingly rapid decadence is enhanced by the fact that it occurs in the tomb of a man who pays tribute in such style to an artist grandfather, its original occupant, and includes figures of the revered and deified royalties, Amenhotep I and his mother Nofretari.

In contrast with this, an example of late XVIII dynasty painting is appended (fig. 6 from Tomb 69) showing the pleasing but unpromising style made familiar to us by the tomb of Nakht. The slovenly feet and the over-sized head are defects into which liberty had led the painters of Thebes, and which were not to stop at such minor blemishes. In this and a sister figure the artist has planted several small yellow stains on the lower part of the white gown, thereby proving definitely, as it seems to me, that the smeary color on the upper part is meant to represent its discoloration by the pomade with which the hair and arms were anointed.

Another picture (fig. 7) has been selected for illustration simply because it is typical. Being fifty inches long, it is practically the limit within which scale-reduction can be avoided, and most of our work conforms to this rule, though it is often highly inconvenient. The picture represents one Userhêt hunting from his two-horse chariot in the desert. His tomb (No. 56, dating to the middle of the XVIII dynasty) has in general little merit. The hunted animals, though not badly grouped, are not well drawn and are so summarily colored that it is now difficult to seize the outlines, especially in the case of the stricken hyena turning its head in an effort to draw the arrow with its teeth. The action, however, is spirited, and the horses are drawn in the improved style which came with better acquaintance with this exotic animal. One can scarcely conceive conditions in the Egyptian desert which gave hope of overtaking swift game in a chariot, but if

³ Scheil, *Tombeau des Graveurs*, Pl. III, and shortly in Vol. IV of the Tytus Memorial Series, Pl. VIII.

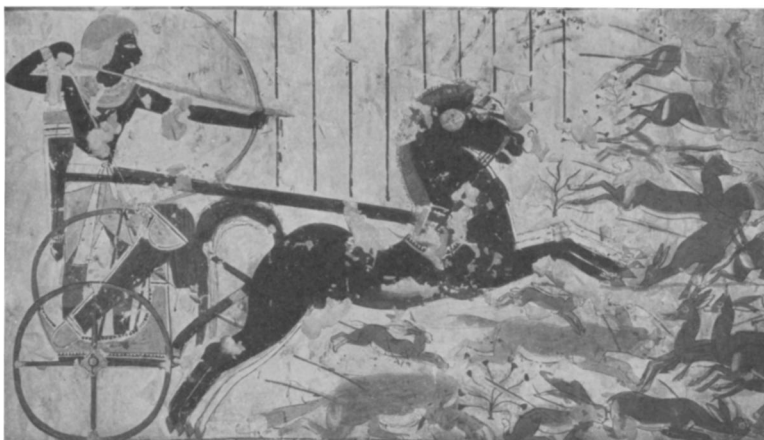


FIG. 7



FIG. 8

the hunter drove to the ground and then followed the chase on foot, this picture would probably be regarded as an excellent condensation of the narrative. The green of the bushes has faded out, leaving little but the red branches.

This same tomb was eventually adopted as a dwelling by a Christian anchorite who, being still subject to temptations of the flesh or liking to fancy himself so, proceeded to smear out all the female figures on the walls, and has thereby quite ruined their appearance. A more amusing memorial of his residence is his effort to follow in the footsteps of his ancestors by drawing what his contemporaries perhaps recognized as horses (fig. 9). We can only identify them by the attitude, and their close proximity to the picture just quoted; for he has drawn them across the adjoining scene. The effort to render the head-trappings and the ears is a very triumph of failure. Had the model of the horse not given a clue to his intention, one would

have thought that the monk was endeavoring to cast out the devils that haunted him by Beëlzebub, chief of the devils. These abortions probably represent, not very unfairly, the level of purely native painting in early Christian days.

It was not only Christians, however, who failed to appreciate form when rendered before them. A horse a yard away from the first, drawn presumably by a third-rate artist, not only harks back to the worst rendering of the animal known, but out-reaches it (fig. 8). It is fair that the best and worst efforts of the Egyptians should be laid before the world together, since they themselves brought them so closely in contact, and it happens that this year we have found time to record a few of their failures also.

I have to thank my wife and Charles K. Wilkinson for the pains they have taken to reach accuracy; it is so easy to produce rather-more-or-less copies.

N. DE GARIS DAVIES.

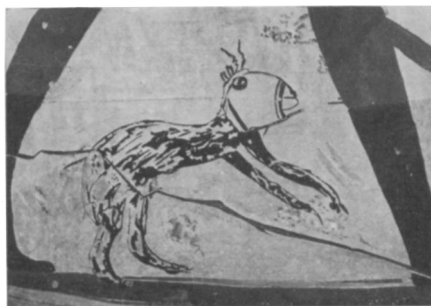


FIG. 9